

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LAGOS 03751 231521Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 3751

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PDEV, NI
SUBJECT: FEDESCO: A NORTHERN MAJORITY

REF: (A) LAGOS 3302, (B) LAGOS 2618

SUMMARY: FEDECO EXECUTIVE SECRETARY KURFI HAS
INDICATED TO US THAT THE NORTH HAS A MAJORITY OF THE
NIGERIAN ELECTORATE. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY OFFICER MET ON MARCH 12 WITH FEDERAL
ELECTORAL COMMISSION (FEDECO) EXECUTIVE SECRETARY,
ALHAJI ADAMU KURFI, WHO MADE THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS
ON THE RECENT NIGERIAN VOTER REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN.
2. SIZE OF THE ELECTORATE: KURFI SAID HE HAD NOT
BEEN SURPRISED BY THE FINAL FIGURE OF 47.7 MILLION
REGISTERED VOTERS. HE FELT IT REFLECTED THE FACT
THAT FEDECO HAD DONE A GOOD JOB DESPITE THE
CRITICISM IN THE PRESS. KURFI THOUGHT THAT THE FINAL
FIGURE ALSO PROVED THAT PREVIOUS NIGERIAN CENSUS COUNTS
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PAGE 02 LAGOS 03751 231521Z

HAD MISSED A GREAT DEAL OF THE POPULATION.

3. MORE WOMEN THAN MEN: KURFI FELT THAT THE FACT THAT
MORE WOMEN THAN MEN WERE REGISTERED WAS PRIMARILY A
RESULT OF NIGERIAN WORKING HOURS. REGISTRATION WORKERS
CAME DURING THE DAY AND MISSED MANY MALES WHO LEAVE
EARLY FOR WORK AND RETURN HOME LATE AT NIGHT

SECONDARILY, IT REFLECTED SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE NORTH WHERE IN THE PAST MANY WOMEN WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO REGISTERE.

4. STATE BY STATE TOTALS: KURFI DECLINED TO REVEAL STATE BY STATE FIGURES. HE SAID THAT THE STATE COMMISSIONERS WOULD BE MEETING SOON AND STATE FIGURES WOULD BE RELEASED AFTER THAT MEETING. KURFI HINTED STRONGLY HOWEVER THAT THE TRADITIONAL NORTHERN MAJORITY WAS REFLECTED IN THE REGISTRATION FIGURES. KURFI SAID, IN DISCUSSING CENSUS DATA, THAT THE 1952, 1963 AND 1973 CENSUS FIGURES HAD CONSISTENTLY INDICATED THAT 'A MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE IN NIGERIA LIVE IN THE NORTH.' ASKED IF WE COULD EXPECT ANY SURPRISES ON THE GEOGRAPHIC CONFIGURATION OF THE ELECTORATE, KURFI LAUGHED AND SAID THERE WOULD BE 'NO SURPRISES' IN THAT REGARD IN PARTICULAR.

5. COMMENT: FEDECO OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN NOTABLY RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS THE NATURE OF THE ELECTORATE SINCE THE TOTAL FIGURE WAS ANNOUNCED ON MARCH 12. IN THIS CONVERATION, KURFI WAS EXTREMELY GUARDED IN HIS REMARKS ON THE POLITICALLY SENSITIVE PROBLEM OF THE SIZE OF STATE ELECTORATES. HOWEVER, WE INTERPRET HIS ELLIPTICAL REMARKS TO MEAN THAT THE NORTH HAS RETAINED ITS ELECTORAL MAJORITY IN THE NEW REGISTRATION.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 LAGOS 03751 231521Z

6. IT IS CONVENTIONAL WISDOM IN NIGERIAN POLITICS THAT THE CENSUSES OF 1952 AND 1963 SERIOUSLY UNDERCOUNTED THE NORTH. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ABORTIVE 1973 CENSUS WHICH SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASED THE NORTHERN COUNT MAY HAVE BEEN AN ACCURATE REFLECTION OF NIGERIA'S POPULATION. THUS, FEDECO'S LARGE ELECTORATE FIGURE MAY FOLLOW THE CONFIGURATION OF THE 1973 CENSUS. IF SO, THE NORTH NOT ONLY HAS A MAJORITY, IT MAY HAVE A LARGE MAJORITY OF THE ELECTORATE. END COMMENT.
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